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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 29th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. VICHEZ ASHER (Nicaragua)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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AGENDA ITEM 149: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE OF INTERNAL OVERSIGHT SERVICES

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 149: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE OF INTERNAL OVERSIGHT SERVICES (A/49/449, A/49/891, A/49/892 and A/49/959; A/50/459 and Add.1)

1. Mr. PASCHKE (Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services), noting the many innovations that had been introduced in the process of establishing the new Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), said that the current meeting marked another first: the Committee was taking a comprehensive look at the work accomplished by the new Office and considering the reports which it had submitted to the General Assembly through the Secretary-General, as well as its first summary report. The reports submitted in the course of the past 12 months had been produced by the four units which formed the Office of Internal Oversight Services: three by the Audit and Management Consulting Division, two by the Central Evaluation Unit, three by the Central Monitoring and Inspection Unit and one by the Investigations Unit. They reflected the different types of oversight work performed by the Office (audits, in-depth evaluations, inspections and investigations) and were therefore different in approach, length, focus of recommendations and other respects. The reports had, however, one element in common (with the exception of the investigation reports which followed a different approach): before being put on paper, the findings and recommendations were always thoroughly discussed with the managers of the units concerned. The reports were not judgements handed down by an outside authority, but the result of a dialogue. That did not imply that the "clients" always agreed with the Office or that they enthusiastically accepted the criticism directed at them. It would be surprising if they did.

2. Currently, the auditors, inspectors and evaluators were frequently confronted with reluctance, apprehension and the sentiment that the Office of Internal Oversight Services was reducing the amount of time available for substantive work. The relationship between the Office and its clients would always contain an element of conflict, but that tension could be channelled into producing positive results for the Organization. In that context, it should be pointed out that departments took an excessively long time to react to the draft reports produced by the Office. In future, more emphasis should be placed on the need to respect deadlines, in view of the constraints involved in the submission of final reports to the General Assembly. To the time the Office spent discussing findings and recommendations with its clients, five or six weeks had to be added for document processing. As a result, it sometimes happened that, by the time the reports reached delegations, the situation described in them had already changed.

3. He was aware that two reports produced by the Office of Internal Oversight Services had been leaked to outsiders. He deplored that fact and stated unequivocally that the Office never made any report available to unauthorized third parties or to the media before submitting it to the General Assembly.

4. The report in document A/50/459 attempted to summarize the work of the Office of Internal Oversight Services during the first seven and a half months of its existence. It emphasized, in essence, the meaningful role of the Office

in the new management culture of the United Nations. OIOS had become a body to be reckoned with, and its existence and its work provided an element of responsibility and accountability to the Organization. Its findings illustrated the need for a continuous and effective oversight mechanism, and its recommendations would help the Organization to serve Member States better. The report clearly spelled out the two distinct roles which the Office of Internal Oversight Services had to play: to promote better management throughout the Organization, and to deter corruption, waste, fraud and mismanagement. The report also defined the areas of priority for the Office's oversight work, those areas where considerable amounts of money were at stake and where either the nature or the environment of United Nations activities could be defined as particularly risky: peace-keeping missions, humanitarian activities and procurement. It went without saying that those priorities might shift in the years to come, but four and a half months after the cut-off date of the first report, those same areas continued to be of importance to the Office's oversight efforts.

5. He expressed appreciation to those Member States which had continued to support the work of the Office for Internal Oversight Services by seconding professionals to it on a temporary basis and free of charge. He wished to state very clearly that he fully embraced the principle of equitable geographical distribution, together with another principle that was crucial to internal oversight: that of professionalism. With regard to temporary staff, he was proud to report that one Government had provided him with the means to recruit for a period of about one year, the services of an auditor from a third world country which could not have made that person available to the Office free of charge. The Office had therefore been able to demonstrate its dedication to the principle of equitable geographical distribution even in an area where it did not necessarily apply.

6. In conclusion, he announced that he would be delighted to brief the Fifth Committee informally, perhaps three or four times a year, on the work of the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

7. Mr. BOUAYAD-AGHA (Chairman of the Joint Inspection Unit) presented the comments of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on the final reports produced by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (A/50/459/Add.1). Part I contained comments on those reports which had been prepared for consideration by the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session but which had been postponed to its fiftieth session. Two of those reports, the final report on the in-depth evaluation of peace-keeping operations: start-up phase (E/AC.51/1995/2 and Corr.1 and 2) and the in-depth evaluation of the programme on environment (E/AC.51/1995/3 and Corr.1) had been considered by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, which had adopted pertinent recommendations that were contained in the Committee's report on the work of its thirty-fifth session (A/50/16). The other three reports related to the programme and administrative practices of the secretariats of the regional commissions for Africa, Western Asia and Europe (A/49/891), the programme and administrative practices of the Centre for Human Rights (A/49/892) and the review of the Field Administration and Logistics Division, Department of Peace-keeping Operations (A/49/959). In Part II, the Joint Inspection Unit presented its ex post facto comments on the four (not three as indicated in paragraph 41 of document A/50/459/Add.1) reports

already introduced and acted upon by the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session.

8. The Joint Inspection Unit wished to remark that for a number of reports of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, particularly those dealing with specific investigations and inspections, its comments had been necessarily limited or nil because of the lack of access to the original records. The Unit hoped that the problem could be resolved and it intended to undertake the necessary coordination with OIOS.

9. The Joint Inspection Unit wished to call the attention of the General Assembly to the fact that its comments on the reports of the Office of Internal Oversight Services were being presented only under agenda item 149, while the reports of the Office were also being considered under other pertinent agenda items. JIU believed that it would be useful to proceed in the same way with respect to its comments. Finally, it wished to highlight the excellent coordination and cooperation between the Joint Inspection Unit, as an external system-wide oversight body, and the new Office of Internal Oversight Services, which functioned as an internal United Nations body. JIU intended to strengthen that cooperation with a view to reinforcing the mutual interaction in the oversight functions of the two bodies.

10. The Joint Inspection Unit noted with satisfaction that, after seven and a half months of activity, OIOS had already, to a large extent, lived up to the expectations of Member States. Despite the modest resources at its disposal and the difficulties it had to face, for example, in conducting investigations in areas that had been traditionally sealed, it had met with success and shown positive results.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.